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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5767  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3479  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3343  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4010  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3987

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001281

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN; DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: GOVERNMENT CRITIC FEELS THE HEAT

Classified By: Acting DCM Peter Eckstrom, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. As a result of criticizing the Turkmen government in interviews on RFE/RL and through writings distributed on the Internet, a former lawyer and deputy school director is feeling the consequences of official displeasure. He recently lost his job and his son was barred from leaving the country to resume studies in Belarus. Moreover, he was informed that his family is on the "black list" of those not be allowed to travel abroad. His situation illustrates the government's methods of stifling dissent; taking away means of livelihood, punishing extended family and making the situation inescapable. The government leaves anyone who expresses public dissent with very few options for survival. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On October 2, poloff met with Akmurad Esenov, a Turkmen citizen who contacted the Embassy with a request for political asylum for himself, his wife and son. Esenov was forced to resign from his job as the deputy director of a school on September 20, being told that if he did not leave voluntarily, he would be put in prison. He had worked at the school about eight years, before which Esenov was a lawyer. As a lawyer, his law office represented some property owners who challenged the government's demolition of their houses. As a result, the government closed down his law office and he made the career switch to education.

¶3. (C) When Esenov's son tried to depart Turkmenistan to resume his university studies in Belarus on August 27, he was refused permission to leave at the airport. Migration Service officials told Esenov that the travel restriction was not due to either the studies abroad or his son's activities, but rather was caused by "another person's problems," which Esenov understood to mean him. He was told his entire family was included on the "black list" and would not allowed to leave. The officials at the airport suggested he send a letter to the head of the Migration Service, which replied that the letter had been forwarded to the competent authority. Esenov's wife went personally to the Ministry of National Security to ask about their situation, but was given no answer. Esenov also wrote a letter to President Berdimuhamedov, and received a response from the First Deputy Prosecutor General that said they had looked at his case and there would be no change in the decision. Throughout all

these contacts, Esenov said he was not informed about the reason for the travel ban, beyond what he was told at the airport. Esenov's son Allanur has been notified by the military recruiting station that he needs to report for compulsory military service since he no longer has a student deferral.

¶4. (C) Esenov himself thinks his family's current difficulties are related to interviews that he has given to local RFE/RL correspondents at various times during the past three years. Esenov did not provide detail about the subject matter of the interviews, except to say he talked about Berdimuhamedov's "cult of personality." He also referred to his creative writing that appeared on a Turkmen website based in Sweden, gunesh.org. The website is edited by a Turkmen journalist, Akmuhammed Welsapar, who was persecuted by the Niyazov regime, left the country in 1993, and has since resided in Sweden.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The difficulties that Esenov is now facing are the same as those faced by RFE/RL correspondents in Turkmenistan, with the difference being that while correspondents manage to survive on their RFE/RL earnings, Esenov is unemployed and has no source of income. It illustrates the risk that people run by publicly criticizing the government, since the government is able to turn a person's life in Turkmenistan into a dead end with no means of escape. END COMMENT.  
CURRAN